

## The Incredible George W. Bush

Today President Bush is releasing a fiscal year 2005 budget that makes the hilarious claim that his administration is making progress toward reducing federal budget deficits and restoring fiscal responsibility. And this weekend the administration, after opposing the idea for months, finally agreed to an investigation of why it was convinced Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction -- so long as the investigation ends after the November elections.

We'll have more to say on the budget after all of its details are released. But its reliance on gimmicks and book cooking, all in the monomaniacal pursuit of tax cuts that will [explode the deficit](#) beyond the budget's five-year "window," is beyond dispute. And even where the budget comes clean on the real cost of administration initiatives -- like its completely predictable \$150 billion-plus upward "revision" of the price tag for the new Medicare prescription drug benefit -- it documents the dishonesty of the president's earlier statements.

As for the Iraq intelligence issue, the president's stubborn refusal to admit obvious facts has been breathtaking. It's clear now that Iraq stopped producing WMD some years ago, though Saddam foolishly sought to deceive the world into thinking his WMD program was going full tilt. But the president can't bring himself to acknowledge that his claims about WMD were wrong, buttressing the arguments of antiwar advocates that such an admission would unravel the whole case for going to war in Iraq in the first place. Why can't the president acknowledge the error (which was made not just by our intelligence services, but by everybody else's) and make the point that Saddam's defiance of U.N. mandates, the long-range threat he posed, and his gross violations of human rights fully justified the war? And why can't he move aggressively on an investigation of intelligence failures that could lead to reforms that would make their recurrence less likely in the future? We don't know which explanation is worse: that he's in denial and cannot face facts, or that he's expressing contempt not for intelligence agencies, but for the intelligence of the American people.

It's becoming clearer every day that George W. Bush has a major credibility problem on almost every front. His serial evasions, stonewalling and flip-flopping on a wide variety of issues would be offensive in any chief executive. It's especially offensive when the chief executive in question ran for office on an endlessly repeated pledge, made with hand raised in the form of an oath, that he would "restore honor and integrity" to the White House and "change the tone" in Washington. If he's this resistant to changing circumstances when he's under the pressure of a tough re-election campaign, we shudder to think where his inflexibility on ideology and flexibility on facts would lead him, and the country, in a second term.